

# CRITICAL MOMENT

Summer 2011

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*In This Issue*

**Allied Media Conference  
CFA Stays Open: Now What?  
Snyder's Austerity Pleasures**



# Critical Moment

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*Critical Moment* is a magazine working to provide a forum for education, debate and dialogue around the political issues affecting our communities • a publication that believes media is most effective when it takes you off guard • an independent media project that aims to support movements for social change by giving voice to those excluded from and misrepresented by the dominant media • a free magazine available at community spaces and shops throughout the Southeast Michigan area.

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## Letter From the Editors

It's easy to see summers in Detroit as a bloom in movement building activity. The truth is, what happens in the summer builds upon months of work, energy, and vision. There is a year-round underground momentum in Detroit.

Collaborations are an ongoing process and summers are often where energies surface at gatherings like the Allied Media Conference, Motor City Pride and more. In this issue, we've highlighted the work of Detroiters whose ongoing endeavors

are addressing the needs of various communities, like Miss Leonard's Reading Corner, The People's Movement Assembly, and AIDS Partnership Michigan. Amidst the threat of massive budget cuts, let's not forget that community action is flourishing in the city.

Despite national perceptions, Detroit is not in hibernation or coming out of it; rather we are building upon years of work on paths that are our own.

—The CM Collective

## In This Issue

ON THE CORNER.....	3
AUSTERITY PLEASURES: SNYDER'S BUDGET CRISIS.....	4
BLACK AND PROUD: PUTTING COMMUNITY INTO QUEER ORGANIZING.....	5
ALLIED MEDIA CONFERENCE—WHAT'S HAPPENING IN DETROIT?.....	6/7
DETROIT LIBRARIES: PUBLIC AND ALTERNATIVE.....	8
WOODWARD LIGHT RAIL: THE NEXT PEOPLE MOVER?.....	9
DETROIT WORKS PROJECT: WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?.....	10
A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS.....	11
POEM: SMALL TOWN CITY.....	12

## Detroit Collages

### The Best Places You'll Never See Q&A with Nicole Macdonald



"URBAN EXPLORER," COLLAGE, NICOLE MACDONALD

**CM: Why this title for your collages? Are these places in Detroit people can't see?**

NM: The title is taken from photographer Eliot Porter's book about Glen Canyon (*Glen Canyon: The Place No One Knew*)—a once-amazing area in northern Arizona flooded for hydroelectric dam construction. By the time Porter's book was published (1963), the canyon was already submerged and only existed in photos.

Detroit in some way feels similar. As the city changes—as we tear down buildings and schools, develop small pockets and leave larger areas crumbling—already my pictures from last year show a different place, so many things are gone.

Not all of this change is bad of course—as neither was (one could argue) the Glen Canyon dam. But it does make you want to capture the city before it changes.

**CM: So the title is mainly in reference to areas in Detroit disappearing?**

NM: That and also the idea of learning to see what is here—what makes these places interesting and unique. Detroit is demanding, if you don't look and appreciate the city from an alternative point of view, you may miss it.

**CM: Could you talk about making the collages?**

NM: They are mostly three-dimensional, some with several layers, combining contemporary images of

Detroit with cut-out images of people from the past. Like most collages, when you put disparate things together, new implications emerge.

The contrast should make you pay attention to both subject and surroundings in a way that you wouldn't without the time lapse. My intention is that viewers will wonder about the people in the collages—both as they existed in the past, and in their current surroundings.

**CM: What about the role of nature? Especially with 'Christina in Brush Park' (pg 1). Some of the pieces with animals only and no humans?**

NM: It's problematic—focusing on nature in the city. It's often touted as a privileged idea, that nature with its wild tameness, will save us from our social ills. But who will organize this 'nature'? What neighborhoods will be moved in order to provide for it? In Detroit, this criticism is directed at those promoting

the idea of urban forests filling empty spaces, or urban agriculture filling an empty work force. "Untamed nature" is also routinely used as a means of promoting the idea of land as a wilderness and uninhabited—and therefore yours to discover and conquer!

Even so, I'm continually drawn to the idea of nature in unlikely places—in both life and art. I find myself taking pictures of hawks circling the Majestic Theatre and thickets of wildflowers in empty lots—whether or not I necessarily 'agree' with it being there—or whether I necessarily know if it is beautiful or not.

**CM: So your collages are an attempt to reflect some of this beauty, if it is beauty?**

NM: Yes, and also, an attempt to emphasize an area by giving attention to it. Taking pictures is a way of acknowledging something exists and saying it is worth looking at. It matters.

**CM: You've addressed the idea of nature porn—if we can call it that. What about the idea of ruin porn?**

NM: Too much of anything (no matter how interesting, like ruins) can become redundant. To pull a subject out of redundancy it has to be taken out of its familiar context. With these collages, I'm attempting to treat ruins as though they are not ruins. These added figures and/or animals now regard their surroundings as nothing out of the ordinary.



## Catherine Ferguson Academy Stays Open: Now What?

BY PAUL ABOWD

Emergency Manager Roy Roberts said June 16 would be the last school day ever at Catherine Ferguson Academy. An hour before hundreds gathered to rally outside the school, Roberts reversed his decision. CFA is one of three schools in the country that serves pregnant and parenting teens—and the only one with a full-fledged farm.

The fate of this beloved school hung in the balance since Spring, when DPS sought bids from charter operators to run it. A highly-anticipated public hearing for the school was canceled in early May, and by June DPS announced CFA would “go offline.”

The school has been no stranger to national attention, but received it again after students and a teacher organizer were arrested for occupying the building in April. The night before the June 16 rally, they voted again to occupy.

Instead, the protest became a celebration. An eclectic group of supporters came out—unions, congregations, longtime leftists, youth groups, and lots of gardeners. CFA supporter Danny Glover flew in on a redeye.

Mind-numbing protest chants were replaced by laughter and conversations about the school’s future. But a low rumble of unease filtered through the crowd. Was this a victory?

CFA will be handed over to Evans Solutions, a Detroit-based for-profit charter company. Principal Asenath Andrews and “core staff” will stay. The

school will keep serving pregnant and parenting teens and their children. Teachers will have no union unless they organize, and the school will be another casualty of the commons. “I’ve always been proud to say this is a Detroit public school. So it’s kind of bittersweet for me to not be able to say that anymore,” said Science teacher Nicole Conaway at the rally.

It is unclear how and why the last-minute agreement with Evans Solutions—which is run by the brother of former Police Chief Warren Evans—came about. Two prior charter bids on CFA were rejected as “financially unsound,” and DPS was poised to close the school citing its high per-pupil costs.

The charter and CFA know each other. Students from Evans’ Blanche Kelso Bruce Academy traveled with CFA students to South Africa last year. Charter CEO Blair Evans is interested in agriculture, which bodes well for CFA’s farm. He connected his teachers to a permaculture certification training last April.

School Board Representative Elena Herrada described the CFA situation as a “dubious victory,” rejecting the false choice between closing schools and privatizing them.

Evans Solutions is also trailed by some skeletons. Doris Bennett, a social worker at one of Evans’ schools, was fired after being diagnosed with breast cancer and filing for treatment leave. The school was forced to pay Ms. Bennett \$47,500 to settle her suit.

Teachers and organizers in Highland Park recount the company’s ill-fated stint managing three

charter schools there. One organizer described the company as “incredibly crooked.” At Northpointe Academy, the company lasted two years before the school’s board dropped them. “They were in it strictly to make money,” a Northpointe teacher says.

Under Michigan’s emergency rule, one person made the final decision on CFA, but the mobilization by students and community altered that decision. An odd scenario remains: a former auto executive will continue to run our schools according to his whims. But the story of CFA proves we can bring our visions to bear on those whims.

Our schools continue to be sold off—even those with the most valuable education models, and those where 90 percent of students graduate. Our unions continue to get busted, and our youth shuffled eternally. Four days after the CFA victory, Roberts, Governor Snyder, and US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan continued the endless rollout of “reforms” that only exacerbate the district’s various deficits.

Public schools are under such wide-ranging attacks that it may be difficult to see promise in the provisional victory at CFA. But listen to members of the school family that have been empowered by the effort to save the program. Downplaying their commitment, and the energy that will continue to radiate around Catherine Ferguson, can only hurt the long-term struggle for public education.

WATCH CFA STUDENTS & SUPPORTERS AT THE JUNE 16 RALLY ON EMEAC’S YOUTUBE CHANNEL: [BIT.LY/KFHSL0](http://bit.ly/KFHSL0)

## No Corner is Illegal

BY CARMEN MENDOZA-KING

From my front porch, I can see the corner—a corner from which the movement of my neighborhood resonates. Jaywalked daily, the corner is between two crosswalks that feel far from the panaderia or Mexican ranchera import store that blares corridos norteños on hot days. On the corner a man leans against a cart, selling elotes & fruit; on holidays, pre-bundled roses and carnations are sold next to the bus stop.

White cars with “Homeland Security” in green swim through my neighborhood like sharks; sometimes stationed in grocery store parking lots, their presence implies an act of occupation. These cars often venture past the areas surrounding the U.S.-Canada border and further into Southwest Detroit neighborhoods.

In April, Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials targeted undocumented parents at a Southwest Detroit school. Children getting dropped off at Hope of Detroit Academy watched their parents get harassed and arrested by ICE. After the community held a rally to speak out against the intervention, ICE claimed the agents at the raid may have “gone too far.”

Anxieties ripple beyond my corner to all corners of Southwest Detroit, which sits along a bustling international border in a hyper-nationalistic post 9/11 climate.

Last year helicopters swarmed the skies during a week that merged both Cinco de Mayo and May 1 marches. The police department’s “riot control” division set up a watchtower on the corner of W. Vernor and Clark. This year police reaffirmed their presence throughout the Cinco de Mayo parade weekend. Instead of the march being held the weekend following May 5, as has typically been done in the past, the march was scheduled for May 1. On my corner, fewer people than last year stood watching the parade.

The increased presence of law enforcement authorities, combined with the absence of a May Day march, reflected the fear caused by April’s ICE raids and increased Homeland Security patrols. The parade was strategically scheduled for May 1 in order to dampen week-long celebrations and the five-year-strong May Day march that has affirmed immigrants’ dignity and rights.

Visiting the borderlands in 2004, the wall dividing Nogales, Mexico from Nogales, Arizona reminded me that I too live on a border. The wall and barbed wire here are invisible; Homeland Security though also present, doesn’t appear as menacing until another story of a raid on workers or families emerges.

A community belongs to those who make it what it is, regardless of “legal” status. What happens to a community when it is under surveillance, and some, or many, fear they will be denied the right to stay in a place they have shaped and sustained?

## A People’s Movement Assembly Downsizing Detroit or Lifting It Up?

BY FRED VITALE

Community gatherings have been happening for thousands of years, continually empowered by a process of collective decision making. Modern democracies, distorted by the demands of capitalism, have replaced community gatherings with a whole host of events and spectacle, like political party conventions.

These methods have become almost useless, requiring us to develop alternatives. Detroit organizations that attended the US Social Forum last June in the city—including the Sierra Club, Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, East Michigan Environmental Action Council, 48217 and Bioneers—know we need solutions based on Detroit’s strengths, not only its problems. The most recent People’s Movement Assembly on April 28 focused on building a community response to Mayor Bing’s Detroit Works Project.

The Bing plan would reduce city services to certain citizens and displace others. The project is also focused on finding valuable land to be given free or at greatly reduced prices to speculators for development. Finally, the project targets public services for privatization.

The PMA was a great example of community self-empowerment. Over 150 participated at Sacred Heart Church. The PMA opened with libations in the West African tradition, followed by poetry. We grounded ourselves in the Earth Charter, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Environmental Justice Principles of Working Together.

Ahmina Maxey, of East Michigan Environmental Action Council, spoke on the history of the Detroit PMAs, this being the fourth. Charity Hicks, food justice activist and a member of the mayor’s advisory task force for Detroit Works spoke on the pro-corporate

character of the Detroit Works Project. Elena Herrada, current Detroit School Board member spoke on fighting to keep the libraries open, and the continuing terror of raids on undocumented people in Southwest Detroit. Maureen Taylor, chairperson of Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, spoke on the roots of the economic crisis in Detroit and offered a vision for a Sanctuary City.

During the second half of the PMA, we attended small work groups around seven fronts of struggle—education transformation, food sovereignty, environment as a human right, health and healing justice, media justice, neighborhood stability, and responsible disinvestment from the Detroit Works Project. Once the groups started working, only one person in each group spoke and everyone else listened. It showed the new seriousness which people placed on their own time and activity, and the deepening respect for each other as holders of true power.

The resolutions and PMA process are evolving. The need for future gatherings and more training is clear. Despite some setbacks, people were interested in organizing another PMA, supported the actions, and wanted to intervene in the next round of “community meetings” ordered by the Detroit Works Project.

The work continues. A small victory has been achieved as it seems that the Detroit Works Project, in a formal way, may be abandoned by the Bing administration. But the goal of slashing services to Detroit based on accepting a crumbling capitalism and a pro-corporate agenda, remains the same. Stay tuned.



# Austerity Pleasures

## A closer look at the Snyder budget crisis

BY D. SANDS

The recent news that Michigan's economy is bringing in higher than expected tax revenues must strike Governor Snyder's true believers as a little surprising. Ever since the last piece of confetti fell at his inauguration, the governor has been hitting the state's airwaves like some tweaked-out late night infomercial host, raging on about the perils of a cataclysmic budget crisis.

Snyder has been urging citizens to accept a package of hard-line austerity measures—tough cost-cutting policies designed to reduce a deficit. He has been touting these policies along with a massive tax cut for businesses as a wonder cure.

The state's \$429 million budget windfall may have forced Snyder and his GOP allies in the state legislature to rework their talking points, but the substance of their program remains. They have been using the "budget crisis" to hoodwink us into accepting measures we would never ordinarily accept. These include a restructured tax code that transfers huge amounts of money from regular taxpayers to the wealthy, efforts to crush unions and the public school system, and attacks on the self determination of local and city governments. What Snyder and his GOP allies are attempting is nothing less than a corporate takeover of the state.

### Slash and Burn Tax Reform

Snyder may speak about his budget as a "shared sacrifice," but the facts tell a different story. The new budget hands over \$1.7 billion to businesses and corporations. Legislators are funding this massive tax giveaway by raising taxes by \$1.5 billion for the vast majority of Michiganders (by eliminating tax exemptions) and cutting programs that aid the poor. Here's a breakdown on the new tax code:

- Old corporate tax code replaced by 6% flat tax
- Tax on pensions for those under the age of 67
- Elimination of \$600 child deduction on state taxes; \$2,300 in special exemptions for the elderly and the unemployed; and Michigan's portion of the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit, which affects 25,000 residents, including 14,000 kids
- Elimination of tax credits for the film industry, brownfield redevelopment, and renaissance zones

Republicans slashed social spending in their budget sessions. Here are some of the casualties:

- \$300m in cuts to public schools and universities
- \$100m in cuts for aid to cities
- \$171m in cuts to the Department of Corrections
- \$21m in cuts to state police
- 15% cuts to state's environmental programs
- 48-month limit to welfare benefits, expected to kick 12,600 people off the rolls
- Monthly disability assistance cut from \$269 to \$200

Snyder's justification for his titantic tax giveaway boils down to the claim that it creates jobs. This is pure flim-flam, and Snyder himself has publicly cooled down on the subject in recent weeks.

The theory that politicians can generate jobs and other benefits for wage workers by rolling back business taxes is known as supply-side economics. It was tested extensively during the Reagan administration and failed. Snyder doesn't care. He is a businessman looking after the interests of his own kind. Keeping this in mind, let's take a look at some of Snyder's attacks on public schools and unions in the public sector.

### Busting Unions and Public Education

While private-sector labor unions have taken a major beating in the last several decades, public-sector unions have remained relatively healthy. They have also been reliable financial backers of Democrats.

By targeting unions like the Michigan Education Association and AFSCME, GOP lawmakers not only serve to weaken the labor movement, they also strike a major blow to their political opponents. They are doing this both through incremental attacks and outright efforts to privatize state worker's jobs.

State prison employees are now staring down the prospect of privatized food service and even private prisons. Teachers and school employees are facing a slew of bills in the State House designed to attack teacher tenure, due process, and collective bargaining rights.

GOP lawmakers are also taking an indirect approach. Lately they have been patting themselves on the back for putting \$310 million of the budget surplus back into the K-12 school fund. They are, however, tying more than a \$150 million of these funds to a "best practices" requirement. These requirements bribe districts to privatize non-instructional positions and force employees to pay 10% of their healthcare.

This pressure is already starting to have an effect. Southfield and Birmingham schools recently voted to privatize non-teacher positions. On the other hand, the Farmington School Board just voted against privatization, accepting wage concessions that make up the shortfall. Either way, it's win-win for the GOP.

Similar tactics are being used against municipal workers. Budget pressures are compelling many local administrations to accept privatization and healthcare concessions in order to gain access to state aid. As if these maneuvers aren't chilling enough, the recent passage of Public Act 4 (The Emergency Manager Act) aims to take the assault even further. It threatens to wipe out unions in cities across the state and privatize entire school districts.

### The War on Local Democracy

Public Act 4 adds startling new powers to the role of Emergency Financial Managers (EFM). These managers are officials charged by state legislators to take over financially bankrupt cities and school districts. EFMs have existed in Michigan since the early eighties.

During that time, they have provoked controversy for corruption (ex-Highland Park EFM Art Blackwell is now facing 20 years in jail for embezzling more than \$250,000) and undermining democratic rule, but until now their power has been limited to financial decision-making.

Snyder's legislation gives a new breed of Emergency Managers (EM) absolute control over a troubled city or school district with no checks or balances.

Under the new law an appointed EM can unilaterally dismiss elected officials and councils without follow up elections; void previously agreed upon union contracts; close down schools at will; raise bonds without tax-payer approval; dissolve or merge existing municipalities; sell off or privatize public assets, and seize control of local civil service agencies, such as a city's police force.

The new bill also streamlines the EM approval process, allowing the governor to unilaterally appoint

Dangerous Dirk by D. Sands



an EM for a city on the brink of bankruptcy that does not pass a financial "stress test". Snyder says the new bill needed to allow action in order to prevent a city's financial collapse.

There are EMs in Pontiac, Benton Harbor and Detroit Public Schools. Twenty-three state School Districts and many of the state's core cities, including Detroit, are under threat of takeover. Almost all the areas under EM threat are majority black. Tellingly, the original draft of the EM bill allowed corporations, not merely individuals, to run local municipalities.

The original language was toned down because Public Act 4, like the rest of Snyder's program, is simply one piece of a much larger puzzle.

### Putting it All Together

Terrifying as these measures are, however, they are not happening in a vacuum. They are echoed by similar battles in Wisconsin, North Carolina, Ohio, Indiana, New York, and all over the country. A recent article in *Mother Jones* ("Behind Michigan's Financial Martial Law," by Kevin Drum) makes explicit connections between these struggles and an organized effort by right-wing foundations like Michigan's Mackinac Center and the Heritage Foundation, far right politicians and corporations like Blackwater and Wal-Mart, to rework this country's political and economic foundations.

On an international level, Snyder's programs are mirrored by the efforts of the International Monetary Fund to impose very similar austerity measures on Egypt and Greece, two nations that have recently broken free from long traditions of autocratic leadership.

Because of the inter-relationship of these battles, it is important to remember we are not simply fighting one man, and we are not fighting alone. Business and political elites around the world are making a power grab right now that is shaking the very foundations of what it means to be a citizen or a worker. We are knee-deep in a social crisis that will determine the fabric of our world for generations to come. Michigan is ground zero for this struggle.



# Black and Proud

## Putting Community Back into Queer Organizing

BY JACKSON BARTLETT

"We're here, we're queer, and we're not afraid of Detroit," seemed to be the refrain at this year's Motor City Pride. Held on this side of the city limits for the first time since 1985, MCP 2011 triggered some of the old fears keeping white gays and lesbians out of the city. More than a few curious attendees asked about safety on MCP's Facebook page, and talk of security and Detroit's perceived hostility towards gays and lesbians (always racially coded) attended discussions both in the media and around town.

Ferndale's decision to hold its own pride only inflamed passions on both sides of the debate, scorning not only the city but the many whites who supported MCP's move to Detroit. But despite white anxieties, and Ferndale's "alterna-Pride," 44,000 people attended MCP, making it the largest pride event in Michigan's history.

**The instant success of Motor City Pride in its downtown venue is bringing some longstanding racial divisions on the local queer/LGBT scene into focus. Activist Michelle Brown contends that what sets Black queer activism apart is its deep commitment to community organizing.**

The instant success of Motor City Pride in its downtown venue is bringing some long-standing racial divisions on the local queer/LGBT scene into focus, most notably those between black and white organizations.

While MCP was away, a strong tradition of black queer organizing grew in its stead. The act of "building bridges," however nobly intended, is having to contend with major differences in the political priorities and organizing strategies of a mostly white, suburban movement and a mostly black movement based in Detroit.

Activist Michelle Brown contends that what sets Black queer activism apart is its deep commitment to community organizing. Having sat on the boards of Michigan Equality, Affirmations, Black Pride Society, The Ruth Ellis Center, and other local organizations, Brown has been active on both sides of Eight Mile. She says that in contrast to the more centralized nonprofit model of the larger, mostly white organizations, black queer activists "put their roots in the community," and seek sustainability by creating a wide base of support and, importantly, involvement, versus relying on corporate/foundation dollars and private donors.

Reverend Darlene Franklin of Agape Ministries agrees. "Sure, we might rely on some foundation money, but I get the best results from informing and engaging as many people as I can." For her, being a black lesbian activist means organizing a community as much as writing grants, and creating a spatially diffuse but broad-based movement of multiple organizations from Lahser to Cadieux, from Southfield to the Lower East Side. "Black LGBT people in Detroit need to find their own voice," says Franklin. In some ways, shrinking resources are requiring black organizations to come together and find that voice. "I don't want to duplicate somebody else's work, I want to support them and their work from where I am."

If the organizing models of Detroit's black queer organizations are different, so are the priorities. "I'm gay, but I'm also black," says Brown. That's why she got involved in the National Black Justice Coalition, a national advocacy organization that has worked closely with the Congressional Black Caucus and the Obama administration on LGBT issues in housing and other urban policy.

The NABC represents the inseparable nature of black and queer identities and the social justice issues that attend them. "Very few people have noticed that Don't Ask Don't Tell disproportionately impacts black women. That sends a ripple effect through our communities," said Brown. Moreover, decent housing is already scarce and discriminatory in the city, giving discrimination against queer people in housing a new urgency.

Limited access to quality health-care and social services compound, for Black queer people living in Detroit, the impact that bullying, mental health issues, and domestic violence have on all queer communities.

Most of all, while Equality Michigan, Human Rights Campaign, and other organizations place HIV/AIDS below marriage equality, job discrimination, and other issues on their agenda, the spectre

of the disease hangs over everything black organizations do. Black Pride Society President Kimberly Jones says her organization plans to increase its support of the organizations and individuals tending to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Detroit.

Although the main priority of BPS for the past sixteen years has been to host "Hotter Than July," (commonly referred to as "Black Pride") Jones says that no organization can do its work without also supporting the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS: "Counselors, case-workers, all of them need our support more than ever, so I want that to be more a part of what BPS does."

The conquering call of some white organizers that, "we're here, we're queer, and we're not afraid of Detroit," ignores this extensive, active, and visible network of Black queer Detroiters and organizations; yet, many hope that in years to come Motor City Pride will become more of a neighborly act and less another festival where suburbanites "stick-it" to the supposedly hostile city. "Pride shouldn't be like the Hoedown," says Michelle Brown. "Some people, white and nonwhite, are acting like they are a part of the community, and others like occupiers."

It is up to all of us," she says, "to out ourselves as neighbors, not just as gay"—to put community back into queer activism.

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800 872 AIDS

### AIDS Partnership Michigan Makes Status Sexy

Downtown isn't very friendly towards runners, so I usually head straight for the quieter lanes and abandoned prairies of the East Side. On one rainy run down Chene, there wasn't a car or fellow foot-traveler for blocks, just a sexy, glistening man pictured on a billboard above the website, [www.statussexy.com](http://www.statussexy.com).

Just about anyone who lives or spends time in Detroit's neighborhoods is familiar with the "Status Sexy guy." A project of AIDS Partnership Michigan, Status Sexy is a multimedia campaign to increase HIV/AIDS testing in the city of Detroit, particularly among black men who have sex with men. "A lot of people have tried to take sex out of the discussion of HIV/AIDS," said APM's Wil Bowen on Detroit's East Side. But avoiding sex is no way to tackle the crisis. Creating a vernacular campaign that also engages the community in the process, he says, is necessary to achieving results.

It is likely because of grassroots involvement that Status Sexy is more than just clever billboards placed in target areas. Community Planning Groups consisting of social workers, youth, and queer and/or black organizations designed a path to services, rather than just a messaging campaign. The billboards refer passers-by to an easy-to-browse website where they are then offered information about HIV/AIDS, testing, forums, testimonials, and events. Importantly, Status Sexy also has a large face-to-face presence in Detroit and Pontiac, with the "Sexy Team" tabling at most local events—from clubs and balls to pride festivals and health fairs. Status Sexy youth are

even organizing underground in high schools where abstinence only education prohibits an official presence.

By building a grassroots base of support across generational lines APM says it's able to do more with less; yet, it continues to be rocked by funding threats at all levels. Rep. Dave Agema's recent proposal to route HIV/AIDS prevention funds towards airport runway improvements is only only the most galling example. HIV/AIDS prevention work takes money, but Bowen sees a new generation of HIV/AIDS activists "acting on collaborations" to concentrate their resources and do more.

The leaders of not only APM, but other organizations see 2011 as a year of collaboration. By reorienting their relationships to one another they hope to duplicate less and strengthen one another in the process. Most importantly, they say, this will allow them to sustain themselves regardless of who the foundations choose to support. Status Sexy, like other recent initiatives, is putting these collaborations to work in Detroit, and the initial metrics show that it's working.

"Knowing your HIV status is the ultimate sign of confidence. And confidence is always so sexy." Visit [www.statussexy.com](http://www.statussexy.com) to learn more about prevention, living with HIV/AIDS, services, and testing in your area.

AIDS Partnership Michigan offers free and confidential testing, Monday through Friday, 9am-4:30pm. To find their testing sites and others in Michigan, call 1-800-872-AIDS or visit [www.partnership.org](http://www.partnership.org).



# allied media conference

The June 23-26 Allied Media Conference is an annual convergence of media-based activists in Detroit. Each year, the conference expands the definitions of both media and organizing into new realms. The AMC has 19 "tracks" around which communities and organizations nationwide are meeting to share skills, strategies and movement visions. *Critical Moment* took a look at several of this year's tracks and how they connect to ongoing organizing work in Detroit.

## Poetry & Music As Transformative Media

This track will be a gathering point for artists, organizers, and educators seeking to create community and center the potential of music and poetry to transform ourselves and our world. We will share economic models for working artists to make their work financially sustainable and explore how those models can intersect with movement building. And of course we will create and share art that transforms and inspires us!

## Poetry Agents

BY PAUL ABOWD

The Citywide Agents are a group of young writers who met through afterschool workshops sponsored by Detroit literary arts organization called InsideOut. By last summer, they were done with high school and looking for ways to connect poetry to youth and social justice groups. They soon formed the Agents. "The idea is we don't have to leave the city to be poets," says Ben Alfaro, a 21-year-old writer and Wayne State undergrad who helped launch the group.

With experience in many a writing workshop as students, the Agents quickly undertook facilitator roles. They began holding workshops with writers at the Ruth Ellis Center, a residential safe space for LG-BTQ youth. CWA has also workshopped at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, East Michigan Environmental Action Council, Youthville's Street Poets Society, and the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility. The Agents have facilitated workshops at InsideOut's High School Writers Conference and participated in Remixing the Art of Social Change, a hip hop and social justice conference in Chicago.

### Poetry and Justice

"A poet's work is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it from going to sleep." The heat on this thick June day threatens the Agents with slumber, but the poets stay on top of Salman Rushdie's tasks for poets, which headline the blog where they

post their latest poems.

Some of the Agents have just returned from a clean-up at Cass Park with a fledgling environmental justice youth group. Now they are prepping for a workshop with local Environmental Justice activist and poet William Copeland. The big paper goes up on the wall, and Copeland kicks the session off with "Respiration," a coughing call to action on air quality in Detroit, and the power of breath as resistance.

Around the table, a few of the Agents digest Copeland's rich lyrical diet. There's Tia, a Wayne State student; Ariana, one of six Agents representing Detroit in a national slam competition this summer; and Justin (see page 12), who says, "I'm killing myself and losing sleep all in the name of poetry."

With Copeland, they are connecting environmental justice and poetry. The conversation turns to the city's incinerator, outdated pollution controls and all, which spits toxins into the city sky. "Detroit's asthma rates are 3 to 4 times higher than the rest of the state," says Copeland. "We don't have citywide recycling like most cities because the incinerator needs to burn plastic to stay open."

A dissection of the words "environment" and "justice" winds its way around the table. Environments are the built forms, but also the media, the culture, the mood of a place. And their environments?

The sensory associations, the history, the rich texts of culture and experience emerge. Ariana says her environment is "home cookin'" and "creole." Justin mentions "vacancy" and "unity." Their next poems are already being written.

Copeland asks: "What about true justice? What would that look like?" Ariana says, "Each voice equally." "Wrongs into rights," says Justin, who immediately imposes a reality check. "Can that happen? It can, on occasion." Rushdie would be proud.

The Agents are keeping their pens busy, using each workshop to write around mainstream narratives of the city. "Everyone else feels entitled to their say about what Detroit is and what its value is," says Alfaro. "Youth in the city have the real call to define their circumstances."

This summer CWA is creating a monthly youth open mic. The kickoff event will take place Friday, June 24 at the Majestic Cafe as part of the Allied Media Conference's bowling and karaoke night. The open mic will continue monthly at Thistle Coffee House on 2nd Ave., and will be paired with discussions about issues youth face in Detroit.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN COLLABORATING WITH INSIDE-OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT'S CITYWIDE AGENTS, EMAIL THEM AT CITYWIDEAGENTS313@GMAIL.COM.



"DEQUINDRE CUT ART LESSON," COLLAGE, NICOLE MACDONALD

## Trans and Queer Youth Media

LGBTQ young people are using digital storytelling, participatory action research, community mapping, and performance and documentary film as tools for healing, education and community organizing. This track will highlight this liberatory work and strengthen the skills and networks among youth organizers. This track shows how Trans & Queer youth transform from being victim to survivor, activist to revolutionary.

## Detroit Connections: REPRESENT

BY LANCE HICKS

As a mixed-raced, trans person from Detroit, media is something that has become increasingly crucial to my life. Images of people who share my identity, members of my community, or things going on here in Detroit--my home--are frustrating, to say the least. I'm still young, now; but a few years ago, when I was in high school, things were even harder. This summer, I'm teaming up with a small group of new and old friends to create a summer program that can fight back against mainstream media injustice. The project is called REPRESENT: A season-long crash-course in media-making that will put the cam-

era in the hands of LGBTQ youth of color--literally.

This summer, we'll be kicking the program off with a trip to the Allied Media Conference. The conference organizers have been amazingly generous, and offered us the opportunity to attend, with adult volunteer sponsorship for youth in the program. I'm hoping the youth who attend are able to get the same powerful experience that I had when I attended for the first time, shortly after coming out. I'm so grateful to the folks organizing this year, as well as in past years, for keeping this conference local--focusing on what we, as Detroiters, are capable of doing with our own resources and community.

REPRESENT was born out of a desire to provide a space for LGBTQ youth of color to speak on their own behalf. Recent media trends have thrown Detroit into the spotlight, and our city is constantly misrepresented. Parallel to this injustice is the near-total erasure of LGBTQ youth of color in the media. Too often, LGBTQ youth are portrayed as a single interest-group, made up only of white, able-bodied, middle class, and otherwise privileged people. This summer, REPRESENT will challenge that paradigm by providing a small collective of LGBTQ youth of

color with the resources and support they need to create media that rings true to them.

Collective members will examine already-existing media representations of our communities, and work together to make decisions about what issues and perspectives we feel should be highlighted. We'll meet twice a week, attend local events, and volunteer with community groups. Then, we'll record what we learn--using photography, blogs, video, and any other media that strikes our fancy, we'll paint a picture of Detroit that feels real to us.

At the end of the year, we'll show off our work in a summer's end art show, and even get the chance to try selling some pieces. Everything is free to youth, and we can help out with transportation or other logistics, if necessary.

MORE INFORMATION AT: DETROITREPRESENT@GMAIL.COM 313-279-1279 WWW.DETROITREPRESENT.ORG

LANCE HICKS IS A NATIVE DETROITER, WHO BECAME INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING WORK THROUGH BUILDING COLLABORATIVE MOVEMENTS WITH QUEER YOUTH AFTER COMING OUT AS TRANS IN 2005.



## Growing Safer Communities

Putting Transformative Justice at center stage, this dynamic track is chock full of communication strategies, tools and dreams for anyone working to build safety from violence and abuse in their communities without using the police or criminal legal system! This track will bring together collectives from across North America and beyond to explore the brilliant ways we're (nonviolently) kicking butt and building the systems we need to be safe and free.

## Transformative Justice in Detroit

BY SARAH COFFEY

A common misunderstanding is that community safety flows from law enforcement and stiff punishment. The more police, the safer we are; the more people in prison, the safer the streets. In fact, statistics tell a different story.

"The Detroit police estimate that 70 percent of the calls they get are in response to an incident between people who know each other," says Ron Scott of the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality. "Unfortunately these are situations where violence is being responded to with violence, when what's needed is to

stop the conflict before someone calls the police."

Recognizing that calling the police often results in negative outcomes for the poor and people of color, DCAPB has begun an initiative to create eight neighborhood Peace Zones. At these sites community members will not only have a place to resolve conflict without police intervention, but also to address issues before they become conflicts through peace building activities. In the meantime, DCAPB works with community affected by police violence—like the family of seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, who was killed in a 2010 raid by Detroit Police while being filmed for an A&E reality TV show.

Nine months ago in the Corktown neighborhood, homeowner Steve DiPonio attacked Charles Duncan, purportedly because he was tired of Duncan sleeping in a doorway near his home. Corktown is a community that's seen rich restaurateurs and other moneyed interests moving in next to a large homeless and poor population. DiPonio beat Duncan with a bat before tying his feet with a rope and pulling him toward his truck, threatening to drag him to the river. The intensely racist attack illustrated the clash between existing homeless and poor community members and those wanting to "revitalize" Corktown.

Corktown Restorative Justice formed in re-

sponse, holding monthly meetings between street folk and homed residents to deal with harassment and violence on the street. They're planning a Corktown storytelling/speakout event at the Clem Kern statue, and are discussing a conflict resolution/restorative justice center with Bill Wylie-Kellerman, Pastor at St. Peter's church. "Detroit holds the possibility of becoming a center for community-based restorative justice, much as it has for urban agriculture," says Wylie-Kellerman.

Another group of local practitioners and community members has formed to apply restorative justice principles in Detroit and also statewide. "A lot of people already do this in their daily lives," said Marcia Lee, an organizer with the group, which aims to be "more intentional in promoting restorative justice, healing harm and building community."

On Grand River in Zone 8, Yusef Shakur, Kwasi Akwamu and the members of Urban Network Bookstore have been supporting the transformational work of formerly incarcerated men and women through a support group called Second Chance and other programs. "We show people it's possible to realize their human potential," said Shakur. At the end of the month Urban Network will be hosting its grand re-opening, debuting a newly constructed neighborhood Internet café, two big screen TVs, numerous workshops and a full-fledged kitchen.

The profound healing work necessary for us to survive as a species is being undertaken in small ways all around us. Innovative shifts toward positive, solution-oriented and community-centered safety and accountability strategies are percolating throughout the city of Detroit.

CONTACT DETROIT COALITION AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY BY EMAIL: DETROITCOALITION@ATT.NET, OR PHONE: 313-963-8116. OR TUNE INTO "FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE" FROM 10-11AM ON WDTW, 1310 AM.

CONTACT CORKTOWN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH: 313-841-7554.

EMAIL MARCIA LEE AT MARCIAYLEE@GMAIL.COM FOR INFORMATION ABOUT MONTHLY PEACEMAKING CIRCLES. THE NEXT ONE IS JUNE 28, 4-7PM.

THE URBAN NETWORK GRAND RE-OPENING IS ON JUNE 15, 5740 GRAND RIVER. ALL ARE WELCOME.



"BACK TO THE FUTURE," COLLAGE, NICOLE MACDONALD

## Media in Our Bodies: Dance and Performance Arts

The way we move our bodies is a form of media. It can be transformative and participatory. It can document, subvert and protect. This track is for people who want to geek-out on the potential for dance and performance arts to heal and inspire our communities. We want to make movement accessible to all ages and bodies.

## The Godboldo Family Heals

BY PAUL ABOWD

Ariana Godboldo's illness began with a vaccination. After several years of homeschooling, her mother Maryanne decided to enroll the 13-year-old in Detroit Public Schools. But to enroll in DPS, Ariana had to get shots. "It did almost immediate damage," says Maryanne. "Ariana became unfocused, withdrawn, lethargic."

This was unusual for a girl who excelled at swimming and horseback riding—and who refused to be held back by a partial amputation of her right leg shortly after birth. With a prosthetic leg, Ariana studied and performed global rhythms under the tutelage of her mother and aunt, both professionally-trained dancers.

But the immunizations made Ariana's brain swell, a condition called encephalitis. Instead of attributing her illness to the immunizations, doctors at various hospitals and child treatment centers repeatedly diagnosed her with psychosis. Within weeks, she was prescribed a controversial psychotropic drug called Risperdal—which made Ariana's condition worse.

"It's a foreign substance that scrambles the brain, and Ariana's body rejected it," says Maryanne.

Maryanne decided to undergo the difficult process of weaning her daughter from Risperdal, whose manufacturer has been the target of class-action lawsuits in 10 states. The children's health facility treating Ariana soon filed a medical neglect claim with Child Protective Services.

On March 24, Detroit Police arrived at Maryanne Godboldo's westside home with a Child Protective Services agent. A standoff ensued while police cars and armored vehicles multiplied, helicopters circled overhead, and Maryanne barricaded her home. After ten hours, she was arrested for alleged assault on officers, and Ariana was whisked away to a hospital. Penny Godboldo says she was expecting to take her niece that night, with Maryanne headed to jail—but that didn't happen.

"They gave me the run around for hours, and later we were told she was removed and taken to a juvenile center," says Penny. "They did that without telling me, her mother, her father or her lawyer." Maryanne launched a campaign to get her daughter back after nearly a week in jail.

Ariana was taken to Hawthorn Center in Northville, a medical center treating "emotionally disturbed children and adolescents." She was held there for six weeks while an outpouring of support emerged from around the country. A judge released Ariana to the care of her aunt in early May. When she came home, Ariana had bruises on her body, and the family alleges that she suffered sexual abuse while at the center. "My daughter is ten steps backwards from where we were. She's got trauma now," Maryanne says.

Ariana is making small improvements daily, says her aunt Penny, who has been a professor of dance for 30 years. Penny is the state's only certified instructor of the holistic Katherine Dunham technique, which focuses on connecting mind, body, and spirit. Dunham was an activist and anthropologist whose style drew on a variety of dance cultures in Africa, the Far East, and Native America. Penny's workshop at the AMC will focus on the Dunham technique, dance as a healing force, and the ongoing campaign to return Ariana to her mother.

The Dunham technique has, and will continue to play a role in Ariana's healing. "Dance has empowered her, given her a sense of self, and a sense of character," says Penny, who continues to teach students age 5 to 60 from her home studio.

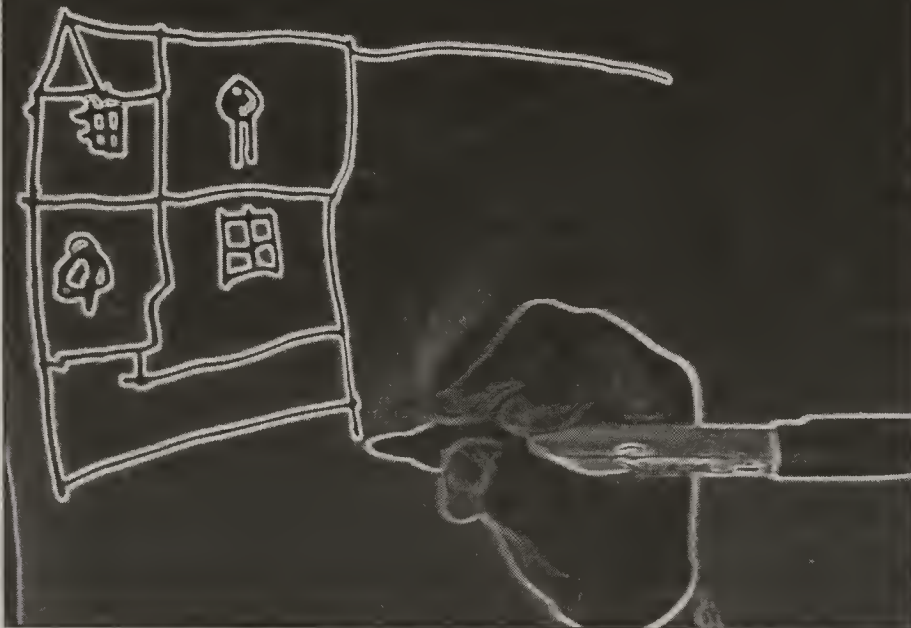
Maryanne is making frequent visits to her child, and remains steadfast in the campaign to get her daughter back—and fight felony charges. "They came into my home illegally and it was always my right not to medicate her," she says. Godboldo had signed a form when Risperdal was prescribed affirming her right to discontinue treatment at any time. According to Ron Scott, the campaign's media coordinator, Maryanne's felony charge is pending while a state supreme court case weighs an individual's right to defend their home from unreasonable search and seizure.

The "Justice4Maryanne" campaign will host a speak out for Detroiters in mid-July. Details will appear on [www.justice4maryanne.com](http://www.justice4maryanne.com). An August 1 date is set for a custody hearing, and is expected to draw large crowds outside the courthouse. "This is a historic struggle at a time when the state has numerous means to take a child away just because they can," says Scott.



## Miss Leonard's Reading Corner

In April 2010, Delores Leonard opened up a Reading Corner and Computer Center at Kemeny Recreational Center in 48217, a zip code historically known by Detroiters as one of the most underserved areas of our city and known nationally as one of the most polluted areas in the country. Leonard shared with *Critical Moment* her journey to creating a community-driven learning environment.



BY TRIANA KAZALEH-SIRDENIS

**Q: Can you give us some history about the Reading Corner?**

A: My family came here in 1923 and we lived in River Rouge, which was one of the three cities known as Triple City - River Rouge, Ecorse, and Southwest Detroit. Most people in River Rouge and Ecorse migrated from the South during the great migration because of the \$5-a-day pay at Ford Motor Company. Many from the 48217 zip code migrated from River Rouge/Ecorse. And many from Ecorse migrated from the south in 1920s and were sharecroppers. Even trying to buy land to build a home was difficult. There has been a history of racial tension in the area. Back then, deed restrictions said people could not sell homes to Blacks. It was a very segregated community.

In my childhood, we did have the school library

found out that Milton was black and was building a home, Lincoln Park seized the home and changed the address from Lincoln Park to Ecorse. The house is still standing in Ecorse. The city changed the address of the house to be in Ecorse. This was in the late 50s.

**Q: What do you remember about Milton's library?**

A: I remember Ms. Johnson the librarian—she was so quiet. If you grow up in a home where you have books, it makes a difference in your life. Some people can't imagine not having books in their home. The other important piece is parents taking time to learn with the children.

**Q: Why did you create your Reading Corner?**

A: I love reading. I want others to have the same ex-

perience and have access to knowledge. Being able to read and comprehend is what helps one up a ladder for success and prepares them for more literate circles. Just because children come from poor families doesn't mean they should stay in the same place. A major goal is to engage children at an early age. When they come to the recreation center for swimming classes, crafts or to play games, that is the best opportunity to capture their interest.

There are three libraries in SW Detroit and none out here. Funds have been designated some years back and our community was promised a library at a property between Outer Drive and Gleason on Fort Street. I have heard several versions as to why it was never built.

The Reading Corner is patterned on the model created by Dr. Samuel B. Milton, a physician in River Rouge where there was no library on the west side of town. Dr. Milton reserved a wing of his hospital for a library and as child, I went to the hospital and the library wing. Talk with any person who grew up between the 1940s and 1960s and they will tell you of fond memories of Dr. Milton's hospital library. It was a lending library and was staffed by two qualified librarians.

Dr. Milton and his wife bought property and the land in Lincoln Park. When [the city]

perience and have access to knowledge. Being able to read and comprehend is what helps one up a ladder for success and prepares them for more literate circles. Just because children come from poor families doesn't mean they should stay in the same place. A major goal is to engage children at an early age. When they come to the recreation center for swimming classes, crafts or to play games, that is the best opportunity to capture their interest.

**Q: How do we make sense of what is happening with the Detroit Public Libraries?**

A: All I know is it [would be] very painful to have to close libraries. Looking at the U.S. 2000 Census data, 30% of the population of 48217 does not have a GED nor high school diploma. Our entire social being hinges on the breadth of our educational attainment. It's a survival issue.

**Q: You had several computers donated and have been working with the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition to set up internet and a computer station. What is your vision for this area?**

A: My goal is to provide access to GED software at Kemeny Recreation Center's Computer Center. Also, Detroit Public Schools have software that students can access for coursework requirements. Most people recognize education and economics equals quality of life for individuals and the community. By providing computer access at Kemeny Recreation Center, the community residents will no longer be locked out of the information that is extremely vital for survival.

**Q: Where do you see the futures of libraries? Where would you like to see them go?**

A: If the populace is not taught the value of reading and comprehending, the library system has an uphill battle. The Detroit Public Library system is connected physically to the Detroit Public Schools. Most people do not know that. [Everyone] can not afford Kindles nor computers and they need public access to reference material whether it be electronic or hard copy.

Personally, I still buy books. I may have read a book several years ago and wish to refer to it or reread the book. Hard copy is mine for as long as I wish. There is something about holding a book in your hand that I prefer.

MISS LEONARD'S READING CORNER SUMMER HOURS ARE M-F, 10-6PM. THEY ARE ACCEPTING DONATIONS FOR EARLY ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND REFERENCE BOOKS.

## Libraries Salvage what City Cuts

BY ALEJANDRA VILLEGAS

Readers, take ownership of the libraries! They are a basic civic provision; literacy is a human right. It is a worthwhile endeavor to defending our existing libraries---we do pay for them after all. Alternative spaces like zine libraries and reading rooms are amazing but they could never replace such a monumentally vital system as our public libraries. I stress the word public because I consider supporting private or alternative libraries in their stead, privatization.

During my time as an employee at Detroit public libraries, I began to see the library system burdened by the many cuts within the city. Services for people experiencing homelessness were reduced during Governor Engler's administration. Many Detroit citizens with debilitating mental illnesses were left to rely on whatever the local philanthropic organizations had to offer. The public library is a place where these men and women can search for jobs online, apply for government food assistance and use Safelink phones, (a free service for those who cannot afford cell phones). Libraries also offer a place where people can warm up or cool down during harsh weather.

Patrons rely not only on Internet access, but on guidance from staff. Quite simply, the average customer I encountered during the course of my employment was not technically savvy enough to use the computers on their own. This is not surprising considering most of the library's patrons

are not in the financial position to own a computer. The library's computer classes are always well attended because of the growing necessity to have computer skills in the job force.

Detroit's failing school system means many in the population do not have a high school diploma. The library provides GED texts for those preparing to take their High School Equivalency Exams. Staff librarians and clerical assistants are on-hand to provide help for anyone studying for the GED. Even more crucial to residents is the Literacy Program, which enables illiterate adults to be tutored privately by staff and volunteers.

The library has served as a rudimentary civic provision since the United States was founded. The oldest federal cultural institution is in fact the Library of Congress. During the days of slave trade it was forbidden for Africans and African Americans

### Nepotism in Library Leadership

Unfortunately, the library was always rife with problems like drug-dealing and violence when I worked there. The manager of the Skillman Branch, Joel Anyim, worked hard to conceal these incidents from library administration for fear of his job being jeopardized. He even went so far as to ask me to destroy the security guard's paperwork. This measure was later reported to the clerical assistant's union, AFSCME, who sought to remove Mr. Anyim from his position. The attempt was unsuccessful, perhaps because of his familial relations to Juliet Machie, Deputy Director

of DPL. The nepotism within the library system

has become public knowledge in May of this year through Detroit News article "Nepotism Rampant at Detroit Libraries". It is now well-known that several of the library's administrative staff are in the same family. Journalist Christine MacDonald wrote, "Administrators say they take pride in the 'family atmosphere' at the Detroit Public Library, but questions of nepotism, cronyism and mismanagement are dogging the cash-strapped system... Hiring relatives is so common at the library that about one in six staffers have relatives among the 376 employees, according to an internal review obtained by The Detroit News."

If you would like to support your local library by volunteering as a literacy tutor or helper at a branch contact [tmoore@detroitpubliclibrary.org](mailto:tmoore@detroitpubliclibrary.org).



# Woodward Light Rail

## Detroit's Next People Mover?

BY TINA DYKEHOUSE

Twenty-five percent of Detroiters are completely dependent on public transportation. The car-less many withstand rain, snow, heat wave, or a half-hour late bus to get where they're going. Among this quarter of Detroit's population are the students waiting at 6:30 AM for one of several buses to school, the mother taking an entire day off work to take her child to the doctor, and the man just off 3rd shift standing at a stop whose streetlights may or may not function.

The Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) has dropped over half of its service in the past six years, and just received a \$7.8 million budget cut from City Council. Compared to other city agencies that saw a two to three percent cut, DDOT bus service lost a total of 15 percent of its budget. The most recent list of bus service eliminations and wait increases spans three pages with weekend services hit the hardest.

The current state of Detroit's public transportation is unacceptable, but improvements may be on the way; specifically, the Woodward Light Rail Project. What began in 2007 as a consortium of private investors called M-1 Rail, light rail project has attracted public support, and is edging closer to becoming real.

The proposed light rail line would run down Woodward Avenue and is slated for construction in two phases. Phase one would lay track from Hart Plaza to West Grand Blvd. Phase two would lead to a final destination at 8 Mile Road. Station locations for the line are dependent on whether trains run down the center, or along the side of Woodward. A centrally located track, (supported by TRU and DDOT) would be faster and would consist of 15 stations, while a curb side, trolley-like line design would have 18 to 21 stops.

The project could cost between \$450 and \$500 million. Funds are coming from a complicated mix



"PACKARD PLANT SAILOR," COLLAGE, NICOLE MACDONALD

Information found within the EIS provides the Federal Government with the purpose of the project, as well as need. It outlines the project's ecological impact, its impact on Detroiters, and possible alternatives, as well as the total cost.

A draft of the Woodward Light Rail Project's EIS was completed in January and is available on the Project's website. The report is an amalgamation of studies and analysis done by the Woodward Light Rail project, as well as citizen input. Notice of the

light rail line will certainly improve transportation along the Woodward Avenue Corridor, making it easier to get downtown. More businesses will open along the Woodward in an effort to profit off of the increased foot traffic, a by-product of improved mobility. But will it improve mobility for Detroit's citizens who are dependent on public-transit?

Megan Owens, Executive Director of TRU says light rail will address some, not all, of Detroit's transportation equality issues. It will lead to improvements such as faster, more reliable and cost efficient transportation for the 30,000 individuals daily that use the bustling Woodward bus lines. With light rail, the Woodward buses can better serve other areas better, she says.

Project officials will submit the final EIS in July. At this stage in the process, Detroiters will again have a chance to voice their concerns and raise questions regarding rail. Visit [www.detroittransit.org/](http://www.detroittransit.org/) or [www.woodwardlightrail.com](http://www.woodwardlightrail.com) for meeting times and locations.

DDOT does not provide busing at a level anywhere near what residents of other cities receive. Sources there note that the low quality of bus service could cause the FTA to reconsider awarding Detroit a rapid transit construction grant until existing transportation options are adequate. Adequate changes at DDOT could take time. The department is highly bureaucratic, struggles to support and hire enough high quality drivers, and faces an uphill battle to maintain a functioning fleet amid continued funding cuts.

Everyone in Detroit, specifically those who depend fully on public transportation, can get behind even a little improvement to Detroit's transit system. But a single rapid transit line is far from enough. Most communities that need transit improvements do not live along the Woodward corridor, adjacent to "Midtown," Downtown, or the few other neighborhoods the city has deemed its favored children.

Transportation is a right, not just an exciting neighborhood perk. Under-served neighborhoods in other states have gone to significant lengths to ensure their city recognizes their transportation rights (see Oakland's Title VI Fight). The Woodward light rail will be an incredible addition to Detroit if the city also addresses its significant transportation shortcomings citywide. Installing rail without improving the bus system will keep transportation for the majority of Detroiters severely limited.

### Oakland's Title VI Fight

Title VI of the Civil Right Act of 1964 insures that all transportation riders are treated equally and are not excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any federally funded program or activity on the grounds on race, color, or national origin. Citizens in several Oakland, California neighborhoods argued they were denied their basic public transportation rights in a recent successful suit against the Oakland's Bay Area Rapid Transit.

In Oakland a planned airport connector was planned to run from Oakland Airport to downtown Oakland. This project was to be funded under a New

Starts grant, the same grant Detroit plans to apply for to fund the Woodward light rail line. However, in its planning Oakland ignored neighborhoods grossly underserved by both the BART system and effective bussing. A transportation advocacy coalition represented affected citizens and rallied to file a Title VI complaint powerful enough to cause the federal government to deny the city of Oakland a New Starts grant.

This action forced the city to provide proof of amended discriminatory transportation practices, specifically amendment of the lack of affordable transportation access in poor neighborhoods, before the federal government would award them the funds needed to break ground on the airport connector.

of private, federal, state, and local sources. Detroit is required to raise \$210 million of this amount in order to receive a federal matching grant, say project officials. Locally raised funds will be acquired through bond related activity and previous federal funds received by DDOT—a \$25 million federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant. The final 40 percent would come from the private funders who comprise M-1 Rail.

The architects of the Woodward Light Rail Project admit they've not yet secured a majority of the funds needed, including the federal dollars. The Federal Transportation Authority is waiting for Detroit to complete a final Environmental Impact Statement, which they can use to measure the city's compliance with federal requirements.

ability to provide such input was placed in the *Detroit News*, *Detroit Free Press*, *The Arab American News*, and *El Central* in August of 2010.

The draft EIS points to a serious need for an accessible, and dependable public transportation system and claims the purpose of the Woodward Light Rail Line is to "improve public transit service and provide greater mobility options for the Woodward Avenue corridor; improve transportation equity among all travelers; improve transit capacity in the corridor; improve linkages to major activity centers in the corridor; and support the City's economic development goals and encourage reinvestment in Detroit's urban core."

The proposed project could very well achieve these stated goals. A well-planned, well-executed



# WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

## VIEWS FROM A FORMER DETROIT WORKS PROJECT STRATEGIST

BY ANGIE ALLEN

The major tension in Detroit's land use planning for decades lies in the question of involvement: which people are engaged and how—and what these power dynamics mean for Detroit as a city of neighborhoods. Land use plans are ultimately accountable to the people most impacted by them. Mayor Dave Bing has made the false claim that the Detroit Works Project is “not top-down.”

I have had the unique experience of serving Detroit city government during two very different phases of community-oriented planning projects: I was contracted by the Detroit Planning and Development Department to co-lead the implementation of Mayor Dennis Archer's 1997 Detroit Community Reinvestment Strategy (Detroit CRS). In the past year, I worked at Community Legal Resources as part of the current Detroit Works Project Civic Engagement Strategy team.



“OVERGROWN PLAYGROUND,” COLLAGE, NICOLE MACDONALD

In 1997, Mayor Archer had community leaders collaborate with university faculty in urban and regional planning, three planning firms, city department and agency executives, and a partnership of several philanthropic foundations to collect and interpret data, and begin designs for Detroit CRS. This community visioning land use process was not the creation of community leaders, but it did have significant resident engagement and involvement.

Compared to the Detroit Works Project, which many have denounced as not having meaningful resident involvement, there are two main reasons why the Detroit CRS was effective: community leaders worked directly with the technical team to collect data, and then integrate that data into final reports after meaningful neighborhood-based exchanges; and the Mayor allowed executive level leadership to engage the community openly about their concerns with the process.

The DWP's 55-member Advisory Task Force includes a range of community and business leaders. However, its members, who have met a handful of times since last fall, have not been used to bridge the divide between government and residents. They are vital links to neighborhood-based land use plans and programs that could help the city develop more than just a “blueprint for the city.”

Detroit Works Project held summits between March and May focused on seniors, youth, environment, the faith community, entrepreneurs and the business community, artists and cultural institutions, and new Detroiters—particularly those that are new immigrants or foreign born. Each summit planning team had a minimum of three months to plan a two-to-four hour summit for approximately 250 to 450 people to result in broad land use issue recommendations to the Mayor by topic—not addressing neighborhood-level concerns. Advisory Task Force members were kept to a limited role.

Only the senior summit planning team, led by the

Detroit Area Agency on Aging made an effort to engage the community. The DAA developed a planning team representing 40 city departments, city agencies, and community organizations, and held 20 pre-summit forums upon which their six-hour March summit was based. Approximately 450 people attended, more than half the total turnout at dozens of city-sponsored neighborhood cluster meetings held between late January and early March.

Compare this to the 1997 Detroit CRS, when 20 community leaders met monthly for six months to design the year-long process alongside executive city department leaders and university urban and regional planning faculty. Drawing on community leaders' efforts, the city administration then hosted a city-wide meeting of over 800 community residents and leaders to elect leaders to ten community leadership boards composed of twenty members. These leadership boards would guide the year-long community

**How can community outreach be successful if you do not know who you are reaching out to? If you cannot invite residents to participate in ways they are used to? If you do not share information in a timely way that can be understood and used?**

visioning and strategic planning process.

Moreover, they established community information and data collection centers to supplement the leadership boards. The centers were housed in community-approved schools or existing community spaces, and employed youth, adults, and seniors to interact with their

neighbors and collect information that would inform the plans of the community leadership boards. This entire process was funded by a philanthropic collaborative between the Kresge and Skillman Foundations. The Greater Downtown Partnership served as the fiduciary of the \$1.5 million project.

The city staff that coordinated this engagement strategy advised the community leadership boards. I was one of the four contracted Planner/Coordinators who managed the city's transfer of leadership to community boards. Planning firms worked with the community boards to develop the final neighborhood cluster plans.

These final reports were intended to be used by city planners, who would be assigned to each community's neighborhood cluster to make the plan real. No other planning process undertaken under the leadership of the city departments had so extensively engaged community residents and leaders—setting a definable and replicable precedent for what “community involvement” meant for future efforts.

Where did the plans go? Although the Detroit CRS was completed on time and on budget in February 1998, the city planning department mysteriously chose to archive the final reports. No planners or other resources were committed to continue work with the community.

The reports identify standard areas of land use such as transportation, education, and environment. They also include non-traditional areas of focus such as youth development and quality of life on the neighborhood and street level. To this day, the Detroit CRS reports—detailing revitalization goals for a 20-year span—are accessible at the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department website.

Current Detroit Works Project civic engagement leaders dismiss the Detroit CRS reports as pie-in-the-sky community dreams. But these neighborhood reports have much more detail at the street-level than the current city has developed.

Despite Archer's deliberate attempt to stop Detroit CRS, a few key processes took place. Several neighborhoods and grassroots organizations continued their own community planning efforts, some in combination with architects, urban planners, and engineers. The Brightmoor Alliance, for example, has had approximately four different land use plans done in the past six years.

Also, community development organizations emerged to warehouse community data and share it with stakeholders undertaking planning efforts. The best-known of these organizations are Data-Driven Detroit and Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD).

Both of these organizations work with established community development organizations and remain open to engaging block clubs. CDAD's February 2010 Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Framework is very similar to the many “zone” pro-

posals that have come out of the Detroit Works Project summit meetings—for example, art residences and education zones, ecclesiastical zones, and hubs for youth engagement.

One coalition related to comprehensive land use has also come forth: the People's Movement Assembly, which is addressing the same types of issues (such as neighborhood stability, environment as a human right, media justice, and food justice) in a more resident-oriented way. But to be most effective, these types of organizations need a citywide infrastructure to allow the remaining 713,000 residents in Detroit to maximize the land use planning information they collect.

The institutional memory of these engagements with residents was lost with the end of the Archer administration. Promises made by executive-level staff were not kept, community development initiatives and organizations were established by philanthropic foundations and by national organizations to attempt yet again pave new ground in Detroit land use planning. These initiatives (which are highlighted on the DWP website) include the Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods Initiative, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Sustainable Communities program.

The Detroit CRS set a precedent to involve residents directly in the program implementation and engaged them in a dialogue that enabled them to learn from each other. Detroit CRS was not perfect but it was a successful model of resident engagement in land use planning that the city wrongly dumped.

The Detroit Works Project collected community comment cards and video comments from residents during the last six months of meetings. It has not posted summaries as promised. The DWP has not held a Mayor's Advisory Task Force meeting since December 2010. Only two meetings in Phase 2 had flyers translated for non-English-speaking populations.

How can community outreach be successful if you do not know who you are reaching out to? If you cannot invite residents to participate in ways they are used to? If you do not share information in a timely way that can be understood and used?

Residents who will be most impacted by development need to engage a city administration or any community-serving organization that is committed through actions (not speeches) to involving them in planning—and carrying out those plans. Otherwise, more than just a moment in time will be lost.



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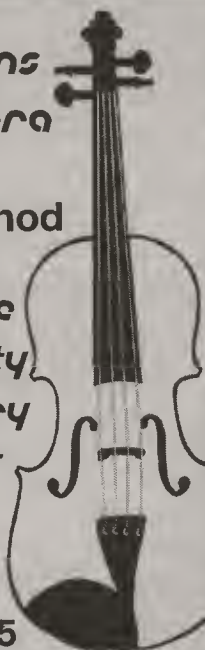
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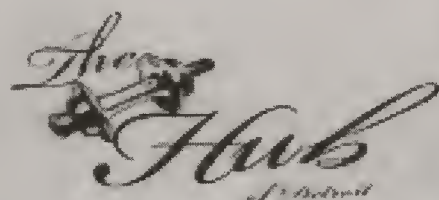
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# Small Town City

BY JUSTIN ROGERS

I've always wanted to live in a small town  
next to a coffee house,  
Where any time of the day,  
I could enjoy sliding wooden chair legs  
Clinking china and rising steam  
All tethered together  
By the flowing voice  
Of a traveling poet  
Someone usually unheard of,  
Usually with some odd hair doo  
Or a really cool fedora  
Sometimes, on rare occasion  
You would be able to catch a scruffier  
That seemed to bring a time stopping silence  
to the room  
Instead of adopting it  
I find myself on the tips of a country's forgotten  
pulse.  
Stocking boxes under the silent dust fall  
Of a Walmart back room  
contemplating the best way to fit  
Drawn out personal theories  
Into 3 minutes and 10 seconds—  
slam is easy, but saying something important is  
hard  
Living something important is hard  
Drawing memories of a history's forgotten pulse is  
hard  
It's hard to accept our dying cities still are  
beautiful  
When we as humans only see ugly  
We fein ugly  
Molotov cocktails in windows and 3 pm street  
fights  
Denim held against its will by our knees  
Dirty looks held like handguns  
Never ending death rock to blanket our  
unprotected sin  
And self inflicted cuts after he leaves—

Welcome to my city  
Where beauty isn't obvious  
But our anger bleeds through concrete sidewalks  
Like acid rain.  
We scream hail maries over train tracks  
Hoping our lost residents will hear us.  
We want them to hear us;  
We're the faithfull ones,  
The broken ones,  
The ones who write love poems to our city  
No matter how many  
Dark alleys we tred through  
Or potholes that we damn near swim in  
Detroit ranked in the top five for angriest city  
In America,  
And why shouldn't we be angry?  
We've been isolated and pushed to the side  
Like schizophrenics in insane asylums.  
Our stained glass windows  
Have burst with frustration  
We paint our turbulence  
Against abandoned walls  
Hoping it will lead someone  
To taste the blood seeping from our gaping wounds  
Detroit has never been as raw  
As it is today  
And each time one of our poets  
Trail their seeping blood on stage  
They wage war—  
We are a militia  
But to America  
Detroit has become nothing more  
Than a dot on its map  
We've been put down  
Kicked down  
And buried—

But everything that grows  
Starts underground  
So you have to see that we're not mad at eachother  
We're just fighting to be the first one to sprout  
Like palm trees in the dead of winter  
We have always been out of the ordinary  
We've always been Hitsville  
Motown  
The glowing edge of the underground railroad.  
Look at the Detroit riots,  
You can't tell me that these are new developments.  
Detroit has been angry for years  
And our fury will remain  
Until our pulse is rediscovered  
And our handwriting is read—  
Listen to our words—  
This isn't just a slam,  
These are words that are meant to leave these walls  
Words to a better city  
Footsteps to a louder voice  
A reason to believe that our fury  
Will never burn in vein.

\*\*\*

JUSTIN ROGERS IS A WRITER WITH DETROIT'S CITYWIDE AGENTS. READ MORE ABOUT THEM ON PAGE 7.



"STAY AT THE EDDYSTONE," COLLAGE, NICOLE MACDONALD